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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 22 January 1998, at 10 a.m.

Temporary President: Mr. GALUSKA (Czech Republic)

President: Mr. SOMAVIA (Chile)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT declared open the organizational session of the Economic and Social Council for 1998.

STATEMENT BY THE TEMPORARY PRESIDENT

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT pointed out that, in 1997, the Council had introduced some important changes in its patterns of work: the high-level segment had ended with the adoption of agreed conclusions and the agenda of the substantive session had been streamlined so that the session could be fitted into just four weeks. Consultations on the reform of the subsidiary organs had begun, as requested in General Assembly resolution 50/227. However, there was still much to be done to modernize the Council.

During the Council's deliberations in Geneva, in 1997, the Secretary-General had introduced reform proposals which included proposals for reform in the economic and social sphere. Some of the proposed changes had been endorsed by the General Assembly. It was now up to members of the Council to continue the restructuring and reforms in order to achieve tangible results.

Another matter to be considered was the urgent matter of financial resources for development; consultations were under way on the issue. The triennial policy review, which was to take place in 1998, could serve as a framework for discussions on improving the efficiency of operational activities.

In the forthcoming negotiations, delegations should refrain from engaging in counter-productive oratorical battles which so often characterized debates and undermined their effectiveness; even complex issues could be discussed in a simple and straightforward manner. The Council would have to abandon its former practices and adopt a more rational and pragmatic approach.

DATE OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT said that since the General Assembly had recommended that the Economic and Social Council should schedule a special high-level meeting at a time proximate to the semi-annual meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions, the Bureau had decided to schedule it for Saturday,

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18 April 1998. The theme for the meeting could be "global financial integration and development and recent issues".

Mr. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation), speaking also on behalf of Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine, said that those delegations attached great importance to the organization of joint meetings of the Council and of the governing bodies of the Bretton Woods institutions. However, they would have liked to see more consultations with Member States before the meeting was announced. It would probably have been preferable to arrange a trial meeting and to see how it worked out before organizing a more ambitious one. Moreover the proposed date posed problems for it coincided with the Holy Saturday of the Christian Orthodox Church which would be celebrating Easter on Sunday, 19 April. Other religions had their holy days which were respected; it would be proper to have the same respect for that Orthodox religious holiday. However, if Member States chose to go along with the date proposed the delegations on whose behalf he was speaking would not oppose the decision but would merely point out that it should not create a precedent.

Mr. GOODERHAM (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Union, said that while the European Union was, in principle, in favour of having such a meeting in April, it regretted that the meeting had been scheduled on a Saturday morning. He pointed out that meetings should not, as a rule, be scheduled on the weekend.

Mr. HENZE (Germany) said that it was his understanding that observers would be able to participate in the meeting.

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT confirmed that understanding.

Mr. EFFENDI (Observer for Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, recalled that it had been proposed that the high-level meeting should be held before the meeting of the Development Committee in Washington. Having the meeting on the proposed date should not set a precedent. The meeting would be the first of its kind and it was still possible to improve the organization. He pointed out, in that connection, that the presence of Ministers of members of the Group of 77 was of the greatest importance.

Mr. ROKANAS (Observer for Greece) said that his delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union; it, too, had reservations concerning the date proposed for the high-level meeting as it coincided with Holy Saturday which was

one of the major religious holidays for the Orthodox Christians. It was unfortunate that that had not been taken into account when scheduling meetings. Greece had no intention of blocking a decision to hold the meeting on 18 April if Member States preferred that date, but it should not set a precedent.

Mr. NICULESCU (Romania) associated his delegation with the statements made by the representatives of Greece, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom and asked that, in future, such decisions should be taken in consultation with all delegations. The choice of that date should not create a precedent.

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT said that the concerns expressed would be noted. He took it that the Council wished to agree to the date proposed for the high-level meeting.

It was so decided.

DATE OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL'S 1998 SESSION ON INTEGRATED AND COORDINATED IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE MAJOR UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCES AND SUMMITS

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT said that the Bureau had agreed that session should be held from 13 to 15 May 1998.

Mr. GOODERHAM (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Union, recalled that, in December 1997, the Union had asked the Bureau or the Secretariat to provide it with additional information regarding the structure, thematic approach and composition of the round-table meetings planned within the context of that session before the organizational session in February.

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT said that the issue would be considered by the new Bureau. He took it that the Council agreed to the dates proposed for the session.

It was so decided.

ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT informed the Council that the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States had nominated Mr. Somavia (Chile) for the post of President of the Council for 1998.

Mr. Somavia (Chile) was elected President by acclamation.

Mr. Somavia (Chile) took the Chair.

The PRESIDENT noted that he was assuming his functions at a time when the United Nations and, in particular, the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies were undergoing revitalization of their economic and social fields. He was convinced that, with the cooperation of all member States, the Council could complete its extremely full programme of work, which included issues such as the reform of its subsidiary bodies and the introduction of new methods of work. Those improvements were essential if the Council was truly to function as one of the principal United Nations bodies and if the question of development was to play a key role in the Organization's activities.

ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

The PRESIDENT said that in accordance with rule 18 of its rules of procedure, the Council must elect four Vice-Presidents. After consultations between the regional groups, the following candidates had been nominated: Mr. Fulci (Italy), Group of Western European and other States; Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh), Group of Asian States; Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti), Group of African States; and Mr. Sychou (Belarus), Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Fulci (Italy), Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh), Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti) and Mr. Sychou (Belarus) were elected Vice-Presidents of the Council for 1998 by acclamation.

Mr. EFFENDI (Observer for Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that 1998 would be a demanding and challenging year for the Economic and Social Council, whose programme of work encompassed complex economic, social and political issues to be considered in the various segments of the substantive session. Consideration of the reform of the Council was also of great importance. Other pertinent issues included the triennial review of operational activities and the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development. The Group of 77 and China assured the President of their support and pledged their readiness to participate actively in the Council's work in order to obtain fruitful results.

Mr. GOODERHAM (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the Council's programme of work was a heavy one and that the European Union would do its utmost to help in its implementation with a view to improving the quality of the Council's work.

Ms. KING (United States of America) stressed the fact that the restructuring of the Secretariat departments responsible for economic and social questions and the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council's secretariat were centrepieces of the Secretary-General's reform programme. Those measures should have a major impact on the Council. However, the Bureau, which was responsible for ensuring coherence and continuity of work, had a key role to play; informal meetings and consultations should be organized frequently.

Several of the items in the programme of work were of paramount importance for the future of the Council and the role of the United Nations in the economic and social fields. In particular, the Council had been instructed by the General Assembly to continue the implementation of resolution 50/227 and the review of key elements in the Secretary-General's Track II reform programme. Another major event was the high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, which, if properly prepared, could set the stage for a new and more productive interchange between various governing bodies of the United Nations system. The most intriguing issue for the first half of the year was the segment on coordinated follow-up to major conferences, which would have an important impact not only on the Council's coordination role, but on its policy dialogue as well. Of particular importance to the programme of work of the substantive session was the coordination segment, which would include a review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. The Council would also hold its first humanitarian affairs segment, thereby extending its coordination and governing role to an important area of United Nations activity.

Mr. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation) said that it was important for the Council to increase the effectiveness of its work as the Organization's central coordinating body since, by so doing, it would improve the efficiency of all United Nations activities in the economic and social fields.

His delegation attached great importance to implementation of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/227, particularly those involving consideration of the activities of the Council's subsidiary bodies. In that regard, he welcomed the Council's adoption in December 1997 of a decision calling for mechanisms for consultation on that matter. His delegation also supported the President's efforts to rationalize the Council's agenda,

particularly within the framework of the Russian Federation's proposal concerning the proclamation of international years.

As a member of the Group of Eastern European States, the Russian Federation considered it important that during 1998, as called for in General Assembly resolution 50/8, the Council should begin to review the decision of the former Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes to allocate to that Group two rather than four seats on the Executive Board of the World Food Programme and believed that there should be a return, as from 1 January 2000, to the distribution of seats established in General Assembly resolution 48/162.

His delegation supported the Chilean proposal to organize a special session of the Council on the coordination of measures adopted in implementation of the decisions taken at major United Nations international conferences. It asked the Bureau to extend the mechanism for consultation with member States to include all agenda items and to cooperate with the Council secretariat. Lastly, it called on the President to increase cooperation between the Council and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

His delegation, for its part, would participate constructively in the Council's work with a view to achieving consensus on all issues to be considered and would support the President and the members of the Bureau in the fulfilment of their responsibilities.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that he understood the concerns expressed by certain delegations regarding the decision to hold the high-level meeting on 18 April 1998 and emphasized that that was a one-time decision. Because Monday, 13 April, was a holiday, the Development Committee would meet from Tuesday to Friday during the current year, whereas it normally met from Monday to Thursday. Furthermore, the Group of 24 must convene in Washington beforehand. All options had been carefully considered, and Saturday, 18 April, was the only possible date for the planned meeting.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (E/1998/2 and Corr.1)

The PRESIDENT drew attention to the provisional agenda (E/1998/2 and Corr.1) and said that with the adoption of its resolutions 1988/77 and 1989/14, the Council had decided upon a number of measures aimed at revitalizing and improving its functioning. Further measures to that end had been adopted by the General Assembly in its resolutions 45/264, 48/162 and 50/227. On the basis of

the guidelines set out in those resolutions, the council would have before it for consideration at the organizational session the provisional agenda for that session (E/1998/2 and Corr.1) and a note by the Secretary-General containing a proposed programme of work (E/1998/1). He also wished to draw the Council's attention to matters in the provisional agenda which required action by the Council at its organizational session.

In conformity with the provisions of paragraph 2 (1) of Council resolution 1988/77, he intended to hold informal consultations on the proposed basic programme of work and other organizational matters, on the basis of which the Bureau would submit recommendations to the Council at its next session. He invited the Council to adopt the provisional agenda.

The provisional agenda was adopted.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.